

IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

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Committee Chair Taylor, Vice Chair Bonham, and Committee members,

My name is Leisl Wehmuller, I am the Director of Workforce & Refugee Services at the Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization (IRCO).

I oversaw the implementation of the Immigrant Nurse Credentialing (INC) program (a nurse re-entry program) through a grant from Worksystems – the workforce investment board of the Portland Metro region. This program took over 1 year to ramp-up with skilled nursing educators, curriculum development, Oregon State Board of Nursing (OSBN) approval, and educational partnership and space leasing (provided through Clackamas Community College). After the initial implementation phase, we produced two highly successful cohorts for the two years (2018 & 2019) of programming before the grant funding ended in 2020.

The cohort year of programming spanned from January – December and consisted of:

- Three total evenings of instruction a week so that the participants could continue working during the day and/or weekends.
- Instruction from experts in multiple disciplines twice weekly and lab practice once weekly.
- NCLEX study preparation
- Clinical placements (during off-season from traditional universities)
- A network of nursing professionals from various disciplines
- Wrap-around services through a career coaching program (25 out of 31 nurses participated – 81% - which means they had low-income and under-employed eligibility factors) that provided:
 - Culturally specific case management
 - Support services to reduce financial obstacles to successful training completion
 - Emotional support when facing major life changes or trauma – allowing the nurse to successfully complete the program.
 - Connections to employers and work readiness preparation with job applications

Over those two cohort years:

- 31 internationally educated nurses started the program.
- 30 completed the program / 97% completion rate
- 24 passed NCLEX / 80% (*nationally, the average NCLEX pass rate for internationally educated nurses is 43%*).
- 20 were placed in RN jobs / 83% (*note, this is what was reported back after funding had ended and therefore there was no staff capacity to continue to capture more NCLEX or job data*).

These INC graduates are now professional nurses in our communities who:

- Speak 2-3 languages each
- Have a variety of previous degrees, expertise, and perspectives

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- Represent 15 different nationalities and a total of over 18 different languages
- Are not only self-sufficient, but buying houses for their family through higher wages
- Contributing to higher tax brackets than they were ever able to before while under-employed in lower wage jobs.
- Have a renewed self-value and confidence by being able to practice within their skillset & expertise.

The IENs not only received well-rounded and thorough NCLEX preparation support, but also a **network of nurse educators and professionals** who could help guide the IENS through the industry and a network of **cohort colleagues** with similar backgrounds who continue to support each other.

In my 10 years of experience working with immigrant professionals, I know that the ability to utilize one's own skillset brings immense value to the individual's mental health and to their family's economic outlook. The value doesn't stop there, it is felt throughout the community as they are **no longer drawing on benefit resources**, but are instead **supporting other community** members, contributing a **higher wage back into the economy**, and entering **higher income tax** brackets.

IENs are not the only internationally educated professionals that are lacking this onramp to practice within their skilled field. We continue to work with medical graduates, dentists, engineers, teachers, and other professionals who have practical and educational knowledge that is left untapped here in our state because of the barriers they face when attempting to enter their industry.

SB849 will go a long way in **reducing barriers** and **creating onramps for under-employed professionals** while **filling some of the workforce gaps** experienced throughout the state.

Thank you for your time and consideration,



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